



THE DIAMOND BUTTON

FROM THE DIARY OF A LAWYER AND THE NOTE
BOOK OF A REPORTER.

By BARCLAY NORTH.

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CHAPTER XXIV.

HOLBROOK TAKES UP THE CASE WITH RE-NEWED INTEREST.



HE visit to Flora Ashgrove had brought forth a fact which was of importance, though in Holbrook's mind it did not receive the consideration it was entitled to. His mind was fixed upon establishing the connection between the diamond button and the dead Pierson, and he relation they bore to the dead Pierson.

These lines established, he thought the way to the determination of the mystery would be straightforward and rapid. Hence he gave little thought to the fact that an owner of the diamond button had probably been found.

He did not blame Flora for refusing to yield up the secrets of Fountain, and in fact respected her reserve. He did wish, however, that Tom had not gone to Fountain before the result of his visit to Flora had been known, and his first impulse was to set out in search of his journalistic friend and communicate the facts in his possession. Indeed, it would be so much easier to meet and talk with Fountain after the interview with Flora.

A little reflection told him how useless would be the effort, for he had no knowledge of Tom's plans.

It was now late in the afternoon, and he could do nothing if he returned to his office, so he determined to call upon the Templetons and see if he could not elicit something from them that would point to their connection with Pierson.

He found both ladies in and both unaffectedly glad to see him. He plunged at once into his subject by asking if they had any relatives of the name of Pierson.

Mrs. Templeton was quite sure she had none, and as equally sure Mr. Templeton had none.

On Mr. Templeton's side it was easy of settlement. Her husband, after his uncle's death, whose name was the same, had no relatives in this country, however remote. He maintained a correspondence with relatives of the same name in England and also with those upon his mother's side of the name of Colchester.

He had visited England a few times during his life, and on two occasions relatives had visited him in this country, but they had returned to their own home.

On the occasion of his death she had received many kind letters of condolence from his family abroad, many from those of whom she had never even heard before, but among them all there was none of the name of Pierson. These letters she had preserved, and if of any use to Mr. Holbrook she would give them to him.

As to her own relatives, she had already told Mr. Holbrook all she knew about them.

Holbrook pursued his inquiries as to her father's relatives. Did she know anything of the brother of her father?

"Very little," was the reply. He had run away to sea before she was born, and all she had heard of him was long after all sight had been lost of him, and after he was supposed to be dead. Evidently he had done something wrong, for the elder Tom little pleasure in speaking of him, and when they did it was in a tone of relief that he was dead. He had died in his childhood.

Holbrook then said that though they had made little progress in the unfolding of the mystery surrounding the death of her son, yet they were steadfastly at work at it. That while he had thought it best to say little to them about it while they were groping in the dark, they had in their investigation thought, perhaps, a man of the name of Pierson, who had died recently, had been connected with the events.

It was strange, but none the less true, that Tom had failed to tell Holbrook of the report the Shadow had made to him of the scene between the drunkard Pierson and Parker. Had he done so Holbrook undoubtedly would have elicited something from Mrs. Templeton which would have put another aspect upon affairs. As a matter of fact, the report of the Shadow had made but little impression on Tom at the time, for his mind then was concentrated upon the task of fastening the crime of murder upon Fountain. Such thought as he did give to it was that, perhaps, a discreet inquiry in that direction might lead up to a discovery of some of Pierson's surroundings, which might help them to an understanding of how Templeton, Fountain and Pierson were connected. And so it was that Holbrook was treading close upon facts of great value without being conscious of it.

However, satisfied that Mrs. Templeton could tell him nothing that could be of value, he dropped the subject, and turned the conversation in another channel.

But Annie, who was sitting at the window engaged in embroidery work, and making a very pretty picture as she sat there, remarked that she was glad the search was being continued, for though they had heard little about it recently, they were greatly interested in it.

Holbrook, who thought there was something of gentle reproach in the words, said:

"The truth is, Miss Templeton, nothing has been accomplished. For ten days we have been under the impression that we could lay our hands upon the man, but this morning we discovered that the man in question could not have possibly done the deed. We hardly dared to admit to ourselves our suspicions, and I should have been greatly to blame had I raised false hopes in your breast or had I pointed to a suspicion that could not be justified. Rest assured that everything is being done that can be done to uncover the mystery."

"Oh!" said Annie, covered with confusion and blushing very prettily. "I had no intention of complaining. Indeed we are really too much obliged to you for the trouble you have taken in our affairs to criticize or to complain."

During this exchange Holbrook had moved from his chair in the middle of the room, where he had been conversing with Mrs. Templeton, and taken a low, easy one near the window where Annie sat.

Mrs. Templeton had turned to the table and had resumed the writing of a letter she was engaged upon when Holbrook entered.

In answer to Annie's reply to him he said:

"I do not think, Miss Templeton, that anything which might concern you or yours would be too much trouble for me."

The blood crept up into Annie's cheeks again, and bending over her work she said nothing.

Holbrook himself had nothing to say, and he sat for some time toying with the end of the embroidery falling from her knee. Finally he said:

"Do you know that I have experienced great pleasure in my calls here—pleasure of a kind it has not been my lot to experience for several years?"

Annie looked up wonderingly.

"I sincerely hope you do find pleasure in your visits here, and it is pleasant to hear you say so, but I do not quite understand you."

"Why not?"

"Oh, your words seem to convey a meaning they do not express clearly."

"Perhaps they do. You know, of course, that I am a bachelor. Well, I have, ever since I came to the city, twelve years ago, lived in a hotel. It is now eight years since my mother died, and the home of my childhood, to which from time to time I returned, was broken up. Since that time, this household has been the only place I have visited where I have been treated with that informality I crave, and where the occupants pursue their work as my mother used to do. It is eight years and more since I have been permitted by any woman to sit so near and play with her work as I do now, and as I used to do sitting beside my mother."

Annie was provoked with herself as she felt the blushes mantling her cheeks, for she had noted the tone of tenderness which underlay his words. To blush was to assume that this tenderness was directed toward herself, when his words conveyed nothing of the sort, and when without doubt only the recollections of his mother and his home had been stirred by entering their domestic circle. She made an effort and replied:

"It is a pleasure, then, at a very small cost, I am sure, Mr. Holbrook."

"A pleasure I duly appreciate."

"Was your mother a widow?"

"Yes. With but two children, a sister and myself. My sister is married and lives abroad—her husband occupies a diplomatic position."

"It is hard to lose one's home. I must be. I do not think I could content myself to live for all time as we are now. I want a home of my own, which I can deck and beautify my own way."

"I think you, yourself, would beautify any place however bare, and make it home, Miss Templeton."

This was direct enough, and the blush swept up again over her face. Holbrook did not wait for a reply, but continued:

"It is woman who makes the home. Men may erect a house, fill it with costly furniture and beautiful works of art, yet it is only an abiding place. Until some woman graces it with her presence and her life it does not become home."

Annie looked up archly and said:

"If you appreciate a home so much, Mr. Holbrook, why do you not obtain one for yourself?"

Holbrook looked at her steadily, and with not even the suspicion of a smile on his face, replied:

"Sometimes the heaven we most desire is not attainable. But I propose to attain mine if I can by earnest endeavor. It is only within a short time that my heaven has been shown me, and when the time is met I'll put my fortune to the test."

Then without permitting reply he quickly said:

"Come, Miss Templeton, the day is fine, the air good and you have been much housed of late—come with me for a short walk. I'll bring you back to your mother in time for dinner."

Annie willingly acceded, and ran away to prepare herself for the walk.

As she walked and chatted with him freely and with more gaiety than she had ever shown him before, she was happier than she had been since her brother's death, and she was surprised to find how bright the day was and how joyous a time the autumn could be.

And Holbrook thought it a rare day—one in a thousand.

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